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## **The School's Concern with Grades and the Societal Consequences**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article is about the school's concern with marks and the societal consequences. It is concluded that educational institutions do not operate in a "social vacuum".

**Special Note:** Special thanks to Dr. Kimberly Grantham Griffith and Dr. William Allan Kritsonis for their assistance in getting this article published in the United States of America. See: [www.nationalforum.com](http://www.nationalforum.com)

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## **Purpose of the Article**

During the next two months teachers and professors in Poland and elsewhere will award marks to their pupils and students in various subjects<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it is an appropriate time to write about the school's concern with quantification and the societal implications.

The theoretical framework for this article is supplied by the general notion of the school as an organization and social institution.

## **Introduction**

Schooling (whether it be primary, secondary or higher) usually occurs in classrooms (Husén, 1974, 3). Pupils or students are seated in these rooms where they actively listen to a man or woman who is referred to as a teacher. A great deal of effort is expended by the teacher in “maintaining discipline” in order to establish the necessary conditions for instruction (Husén, 1974, 22). All the learners are taught the same subjects, and are expected to progress at the same rate (Mercieca). No learning is deemed to take place without teaching. Formal education is compulsory in many countries, and young people stay in school beyond the mandatory age which prolongs their “childhood” (Husén, 1974, 9)<sup>2</sup>.

## **Educators and Quantification**

Educational institutions value quantification – learners are given high marks for good work and poor ones for unsatisfactory performance (Illich). Personal development can not be measured nor compared to the achievement of others, however, portfolio assessment programs do take it into account (Illich and <http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/gsw/advport.html#instructor>). For example, in Bowling Green State University's composition program students include changes and drafts (as well as finished products) in their portfolios in order to demonstrate how much work they have put into their writing tasks. Effective portfolio assessment programs are very time-consuming to carry out, so teachers and students might be reluctant to get involved in them (<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/or/consumerGuides/classuse.html>).

Educators believe that grades are required in order to make students learn which suggests that the satisfaction of learning something for its own sake is not important in the school (Husén, 1974, 16)<sup>3</sup>. Marks are often not a measure of what we actually know but of what we have learnt in relation to what others have learnt. Therefore, it is not surprising that norm based testing is popular with educators ([http://www.technos.net/tg\\_02/3goodlad.htm](http://www.technos.net/tg_02/3goodlad.htm)). The Graduate Record Exam, for example, is given to students who seek admission to American and Canadian graduate schools.

Learners compete for marks which leads to divisions within student groups. Moreover, given that grades can be used by teachers as a weapon to punish students, they may not be viewed by them as a credible evaluation tool.

The school system fosters individualism because it acts as a screening device for the workplace (Husén, 1979, 134). It controls the allocation of job opportunities. Furthermore, there is a hierarchy of school structures, which might not be the same in each country (King, 1979, 55). This means that academic achievement is valued in terms of school structure

People are often discriminated against in hiring based on attendance in school, even though they may have acquired the necessary skills for a given position through nonformal or informal learning. Nevertheless, formal education does lead to both the advancement of society and individuals (Husén, 1974, 88).

Because of increased globalization, there is a greater requirement to compare educational qualifications, and formal educational schemes must play an active role in addressing this problem (Hallack, 2000, 33-34).

### **Concluding Remarks**

The school does not function in “a social vacuum” (Husén, 1974, 5). Whether one takes a functionalist or a neo-Marxist view of the part the school plays as a determinant of society, in both cases, societies are polarized as a result of their involvement in formal education in terms of the number of years of schooling of their citizens, so the school is not the “Great Equalizer”, as it was intended (Husén, 1979, 73-74; Illich).

### **Notes**

Special note of gratitude to Dr. Kimberly Grantham Griffith and Dr. William Allan Kritsonis for their assistance in getting this article published in the United States of America. See: [www.nationalforum.com](http://www.nationalforum.com)

1. This article was submitted for publication in May 2007.
2. Professor Husén, has put forth an interesting theory as to why mandatory primary education took root in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe (Husén, 1974, 10). According to him, parents began to work in factories, so the family could no longer operate as an educational institution. The task of educating children in the Christian Faith and teaching them how “to read and write” then had to be given to a separate institution thus ensuring that industry’s future labor force was appropriately educated. It should be noted that this approach to education does not value childhood for “its own sake”, but only as a preparation for adulthood (<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kgoo0009.htm>).

3. My conversations with university learners seem to indicate that “learning for pleasure” does occur when the material in question is thought to be connected to their future professional work.

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